

Salem Report

By State Representative Brad Witt



Recently state economist Mark McMullen met with the House and Senate Revenue Committees to present the March 2017 Revenue Forecast.

This is a quarterly report to the legislature and the public outlining the state of Oregon's economy and what can reasonably be inferred for those numbers. I'd like to share some of this information with you as it will give you a sense of the good news/bad news that often characterizes these reports.

Our state continues to show growth, although more slowly than during the post-recession, generating an unexpected \$200 million in tax revenue. Nevertheless, this still leaves us with a \$1.6 billion shortfall going into the next biennium. This gap is caused by the rising costs of the state pension system, the growth in Medicaid services, and several voter-approved ballot measures that will need to be funded.

Job growth continues to keep pace with the growing population at about 3,500 per month, although McMullen warns that it's at a slower pace than in 2014 and 2015, down from 5,000. In addition, the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation is causing a decrease in personal income tax revenue. We will likely not know until after tax returns are processed in April how well we are doing, just in time for the next forecast in May. At that time, we will also know if the "kicker" is triggered, which if this happens, will put us even further in the hole.

We are, of course, thankful that this forecast was a relatively good one. In McMullen's words, "so far, so good," but treading water isn't good enough. That \$1.6 billion budget shortfall is not going to go away on its own. In the words of the Senate President, Peter Courtney, "Our budget isn't balanced. We're going to have to make some cuts. We're going to have to raise some revenue. Both are tough. Both have to get done if we are going to meet the needs of Oregon and her people." My sentiments precisely...

One thing that we do know for sure is that one of the biggest drivers in job creation is the small business community. In late February we passed HB 2152, which allows the state's Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) to perform outreach and marketing activities directly to the communities in which they reside; there are 19 of them throughout Oregon. Currently,

they operate mostly in conjunction with community colleges and public universities, so this will greatly increase their visibility. Since their creation in 1983, more than half a million individuals have attended workshops and classes sponsored by the SBDC. This legislation will help even more small businesses get set up for success.

And speaking of success, I want to congratulate two schools in my district who qualified for the Nike School Innovation Fund, St. Helens High School and Vernonia High School! The Fund is awarding 100 Oregon high schools a total of \$1.5 million in grants supporting a program called AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), with the goal of increasing graduation rates, closing the achievement gap and helping all students in Oregon prepare for future success. A full 99% of AVID students graduate from high school on time with the skills, academic behaviors and knowledge needed to succeed in post-secondary education. It's a great program and we are so proud of these schools for qualifying for these grants.

Besides food and water, the most important element in human survival is a place to live. We are still in the throes of a long, cold winter, and the stories of endurance by those who are homeless, or in inadequate housing, have been all over the headlines. There isn't any question that we need more housing of every kind.

There are many, too, who are low income and could retain the housing that they have but who do not have the means to do so. Many nonprofit organizations are trying to do their best, but

they do not have the funds to meet these needs. With this in mind, I have introduced two bills that promise to give low income families a leg up.

HB 2570 directs the Housing and Community Services Department (HCSO) to establish an Affordable Home Ownership Grant Program to provide grants to eligible nonprofit organizations with affordable home ownership programs. In other words, organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Community Action Teams throughout the state are to receive grants that will be dedicated to purchase, construct or rehabilitate homes, and manufactured homes, for sale to persons in low income households.

This grant program will require the nonprofit to create and administer a revolving fund, which will repay the grant so that these funds will be continuously available for the next household in need. The Department will also conduct audits and they will require a yearly report to make sure that the monies are spent according to the established guidelines.

The second bill that I introduced is HB 2961. This bill also establishes a special fund within HCSO called the Home Ownership Repair and Rehabilitation Program. This addresses the dire need of some folks who already have a house but it may be at risk of falling down around them. Or perhaps it just needs a new roof or some dry rot repairs so that they can stay in their home and be safe. Again, this will be a revolving fund and the amount of financial assistance will be limited to \$25,000 per household.

VERNONIA'S
voice
reflecting the spirit of our community

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School Bond Committee Schedule of Informational Activities and Events

In an effort to fully inform the community about the upcoming election for Measure 5-265 for the Vernonia School Bond, the School Bond Committee has scheduled several upcoming events and activities. These events are designed to reach out to the community and provide answers to questions the public may have about the bond and how the funds will be used to complete the school campus, eliminate existing debt, and provide a better learning environment for students. Information is being distributed in a variety of ways, including direct mailings, presentations to specific community groups, public meetings, flyers, and surveys.

Remember, ALL COSTS

incurred are paid for by the Vernonia School Bond Committee through private funds. NO FUNDS are being used from the Vernonia School District 47J budget. **The following is a list of upcoming School Bond Committee events and activities:**

- March 18, Noon to 2:00 pm** On the Street Survey – We will be out on the downtown streets getting input from you and taking pictures of YES voters!
- March 21, 6:30 pm** Presentation to the Lions Club at Mariolino's
- March 22** 2nd Mailout
- March 29, Noon** Senior Citizen Lunch & Learn
- April 1, Noon** A presentation to the public at the Cabin in Vernonia from a panel

including Senator Betsy Johnson, School Board Chair Brett Costley, Vernonia School Superintendent Aaron Miller, and Jim Krahn, School Board Chair 2009 thru 2012. Scott Laird, Editor of *Vernonia's Voice*, will be the moderator and will open the floor for questions.

- April 13, 5:30 pm** Mist School Presentation from a panel moderated by Scott Laird from 5:30 to 6:15 (pizza being served) and School Board Meeting starting at 6:45
- April 15, Noon to 2:00 pm** Door to Door flyer drop off and survey
- April 15** YARD SIGNS GO UP!
- April 20** 3rd Mailout
- April 2017** Sprouts Meeting

Cedar Side Inn



Karaoke
Every 2nd & Last Friday

Taco Tuesday
from opening until 9pm
3 hardshell or 1 softshell \$4.25

Ladies' Night
every Thursday 6pm-close

• Free Pool • Free WiFi • Specialty Pizzas

Check our Facebook page for daily specials and upcoming events
756 Bridge Street, Vernonia 503-429-5841



- Specialty hamburgers
- 8 Draft beers & mixed drinks
- 5 Craft beers on tap
- Pool tables & satellite TV
- Free Wi-fi
- Beer & Kegs to go

Sun - Thurs 11 AM - Midnight • Fri - Sat 11 AM - 2:30 AM
733 Bridge St, Vernonia • 503-429-9999

FULL *dish* SPORTS PACKAGE!
Happy Hour Mon-Fri 4-7

EVENTS

Sat, April 8
Third Member

Sun, April 9
Texas Hold 'em

"BIKER FRIENDLY"